

“Color”

2022 API Heritage Month Essay by Aleia Hofschneider Santos

Peach is the name of the crayon shade that my classmates always used in their portraits when I was in kindergarten at Chinook Elementary in Washington from 2008-2009. I was told that Tinian tanned skin was too dark to be using *Peach*, and that I should try using the dark brown crayon, called *Chocolate*. *Peach* was the color of the skin on the man I remember seeing through the windows of our first car in the states, as he screamed to my parents to “Go back to wherever the f*** you came from”. *Peach* was the skintone of all the cops who came, as they patted myself and my family down, searching for the weapon that the first *Peach* man had lied about us having over the phone.

The choice that my parents made in raising our family in the states is better described as a sacrifice, especially considering how we continued to be discriminated against beyond my Kindergarten days. Years later, at one of my older brother’s football games, a group of *Peach* toned boys told me to “Hop back over the border fence”. After I told my Mom about it, she held my hand tightly as we wiped our tears on the way back to the crowd filled bleachers. When my older sister came to pick me up for an appointment during a school day in fourth grade, the *Peach* colored front desk secretary told her “People like you don’t attend a school like this”. I remember how it reminded me of how an after school ice cream treat from my Dad turned into *Peach* colored Dairy Queen workers calling us “stupid Mexicans” through the drive through window.

There are still many memories I cherish despite the challenges we faced during our stay in the US, but I will never forget the events of that fateful fall day, nor will my Mom or Dad. I

will never forget the look on my parents' faces as they were told to exit the vehicle, nor will I forget how scared I was when I saw them pointing guns at all of our faces. All of the fear and confusion from that day that we still feel years later is owed to one thing and one thing only: hatred. It was pure, unadulterated hatred that the *Peach* colored man felt toward not my family, but the color of our skin that caused it to happen. Yet, the worst part about all of this is things like this continue to happen around the world- hate crimes and other acts of discrimination are committed against countless other Asian American and Pacific Islander families in countless other ways every single day. Yet, every time I reflect on the question of how we can combat the hate many AAPIs face overseas, another question persists in my head: How can we stop the spread of hate out there if we struggle to combat it here, in our very own home islands?

After moving back to the CNMI in seventh grade, I quickly gained an understanding of the stereotypes that plague our own community. With each race came a heinous generalization: all Chamorros were lazy, all Carolinians were uneducated, all Filipinos were judgmental, all Koreans were terrible drivers, and the list, unfortunately, goes on. After hearing my classmate casually describe a person's eyes as "chinky", I realized that while prejudice may be a catalyst for hate- the root of prejudice itself is ignorance. The ordeal led me to wonder how we, as AAPIs, are expected to remain silent in the face of deafening hatred.

While I may never be able to answer my own question, I can answer the question posed by this year's prompt: I hope to inspire our community to take action against racial discrimination and acts of hate by taking three simple steps. First, I encourage all victims and witnesses of AAPI discrimination to not only speak out about what they've experienced, but against prejudice of any kind. In this pursuit, I implore others to speak loudly about the deeply damaging and disheartening effects of racial discrimination when they feel that they are ready to.

Most importantly, I ask that we all try to speak proudly of one another and what we have accomplished despite all the obstacles. Imagining the power that our community could hold in taking those steps fills me with a deep sense of faith in a better future for all of our families- no matter the color of our skin.